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ABSTRACT

State and local agencies must work to provide appropriately designed vocational education programs to vocational students in order to help them become self-sufficient in living and working. In view of the employment potential of disabled people and the legal and economic reasons for facilitating their access to employment-related programs, state and local agencies must continue to explore new mechanisms that will enable the vocational education enterprise to expand and improve its services to this target population. Especially needed at the federal level are efforts to provide technical assistance to the states in the form of help with the development and implementation of comprehensive cooperative agreements, dissemination of profiles of exemplary secondary and postsecondary vocational programs serving disabled students, as well as research projects to collect data on the actual numbers of disabled students in grades 9 through 12 and the kinds of vocational courses taken by these students. In addition, state and local agencies responsible for delivering vocational programs for disabled students must expand their efforts in the areas of professional preparation, commitment, linkages, and student recruitment. (MN)

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POSITION STATEMENT
ON
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
FOR
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

August 18, 1983

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Position Statement on Vocational Education for Students with Disabilities

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education calls upon State and local agencies to provide appropriately designed vocational education programs to disabled students in order to help them become self-sufficient in living and working.

Background

History is replete with examples of disabled people working in a full range of occupational areas. We know about mentally retarded individuals working as welders, blind people in farming, deaf persons as automobile mechanics, and people using wheelchairs as draftsmen---the list can go on and on. Disabled people have proven their mettle; they can work. The limiting factors are not their disabilities, but our ability to see their potential and to assist them in their development.

If we look beyond the Federal laws that demand equal rights for handicapped people, we can see an even more compelling reason for undertaking increased efforts to ensure access and equality for handicapped people in employment and in those educational programs which lead to employment. It's the economics of dependence versus independence. Statistics show that for every dollar spent on rehabilitation training, the individual can expect a return of approximately ten more dollars in lifetime earnings. The amount of income tax

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paid by the working disabled is proportionally increased. For the nation, dependence includes the added costs of public maintenance, institutionalized care, and social security disability payments. It then becomes abundantly clear that we can ill afford NOT to prepare handicapped people for employment.

Services to Students with Handicapping Conditions

Vocational educators must provide learning and occupational opportunities for disabled persons to become independent and cast off the kinds of assistance, although well-intentioned, that leads to dependency. Vocational education for the handicapped necessitates a change of thinking on the part of the employers about hiring disabled people. The disabled student requires a great deal of understanding on the part of the teacher. Different safety rules may be required; more space may be needed in labs to maneuver a wheelchair. More career and vocational guidance centers are needed so that students with a handicapping condition can find the career or vocation in which he or she will be successful. Vocational teachers must be prepared to offer praise frequently. School personnel must administer a series of work evaluations and assessments to accurately assess the students' interests and abilities prior to developing a formalized individual vocational program. Employers must be patient: those that are have found that handicapped employees are more responsible, have fewer absences, and pay more attention to detail work than many other workers.

In view of the employment potential of disabled people and the legal and economic reasons for facilitating their access to employment-related programs, we must continue to explore new mechanisms which will enable the vocational education enterprise to expand and improve

its services to this target population. During the 1981 school year, 34.6% of the estimated number of disabled students in grades 9 to 12 were served by vocational education. This figure is evidence of a continual increase in the number of disabled students served. Between 1976 and 1981, secondary vocational enrollment increased to about 18%. For the same period, secondary enrollment of disabled students in vocational programs changed from 203,647 to 437,397, an increase of 115%.

National commitment to the handicapped, during the 1976-1981 time period, was considerable. The Council, while continuing to support the presence and leadership of the Federal Government, however, recognizes that State and local agencies have a decisive role in expanding and improving services.

A recent study was undertaken, in which the Council cooperated, to help answer the question, "To what degree have state level comprehensive cooperative agreements involving special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation influenced the delivery of local level services to handicapped youth enrolled in vocational education?" Analysis of findings shows that state and local comprehensive agreements exerted a significant positive impact on local programs. This impact or influence is in program operations that are not only crucial to the development of appropriate vocational education services for handicapped students; but also, would appear to be difficult to achieve without some form of organized cooperation among different agencies and programs. More specifically, the comprehensive agreement provides a unique and impartial setting through

which previously distinctive program operations can provide a more focused approach to service delivery by establishing a common language and set of goals and objectives. Unfortunately, only seventeen states had, according to the study's criteria, a comprehensive cooperative agreement.

Another study found that a majority of states responding have put into place the kinds of support systems needed to expand and improve the quality of services. Indicative of this trend are the documented increases in related state laws, education codes, cooperative agreements and studies on coordination and cooperation between special education and vocational education.

Future Activities

In order to continue to help disabled students achieve the goal of self-sufficiency in living and working, the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education proposes that certain activities be carried out by the responsible agencies. Through the implementation of the following activities, the Council anticipates the expansion of appropriately designed vocational programs for disabled students:

Federal Level-

- o Technical assistance. Help states develop and implement comprehensive cooperative agreements. Disseminate profiles of exemplary secondary and postsecondary vocational programs serving disabled students.
- o Information. Collect data on the (a) actual number of disabled students in grades 9 through 12 (ages 16 to 21); and (b) the kind of vocational program taken.

State and Local Level-

- o Professional Preparation. Require pre-and inservice preparation of vocational education teachers and support personnel that will sustain effective instruction of disabled students.
- o Commitment. Put into place state provisions that promote the expansion and quality of pre-vocational and vocational programming and services to disabled students.

  Prepare a position statement which commits the local secondary or postsecondary education agency to the goal of offering appropriately designed vocational programs.
- o Linkages. Establish state and local comprehensive cooperative agreements or other mechanisms to improve the delivery of services.

  Urge local business people to employ vocationally prepared disabled persons.
- o Recruitment. Develop a plan of action designed to introduce disabled students into vocational areas where their involvement is low, or perhaps does not exist.